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### 'The Rise and Fall of a "Europe of the Regions"'

**Citation for published version:**

Hepburn, E 2008, "The Rise and Fall of a "Europe of the Regions"", *Regional & Federal Studies*, vol. 18(5), pp. 537-555.

**Link:**

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

**Document Version:**

Peer reviewed version

**Published In:**

Regional & Federal Studies

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## The Rise and Fall of a 'Europe of the Regions'

Eve Hepburn, School of Social and Political Studies, University of Edinburgh<sup>1</sup>

### ABSTRACT

This paper explores the diverse ways in which parties operating in regional contexts have responded to, interpreted, and used the imagery of a 'Europe of the Regions' to advance their territorial demands. It is demonstrated that parties have not had consistent positions on Europe, rather, they have exhibited a cyclical quality, moving back and forth in response to perceived opportunities for regional action in Europe. Whilst many parties were cautious of Europe in the late 1970s, by the early 1990s there was a convergence of regional party support for a 'Europe of the Regions'. This goal was advocated by minority nationalist and statewide parties alike, causing the former to moderate their claims and the latter to strengthen their territorial demands. However, growing frustration with the apparent neglect of regional interests in the European project caused parties to revert back to earlier or more Eurosceptical positions in the late 1990s, heralding the decline and fall of a Europe of the Regions.

### **Introduction**

As other articles in this issue attest, the notion of a 'Europe of the Regions' has strongly come to be associated with the self-determination demands of minority nationalist and regionalist parties. Party members of the European Free Alliance (EFA) have generally embraced the principles of European integration and expanded their autonomy goals to include the European dimension (see Lynch, Elias and de Winter in this volume). Europe is now seen as offering a new set of opportunity structures for regionalist party mobilisation as well as new possibilities for constitutional and symbolic recognition outside the confines of the state (Keating, 2001). However, what has been less explored by party scholars, both empirically and theoretically, is the impact of European integration on territorial politics more generally, in which the minority nationalist party represents only one actor amongst many seeking different forms of autonomy. Regional branches of statewide parties have entered the 'territorial' debate in response to decentralisation and the creation of regional electoral arenas, and the relative strength of minority nationalist parties at this level (Hepburn, 2007). Statewide parties must compete in aggregating, articulating and pursuing territorial interests in order to prevent minority nationalist parties from 'owning' this issue dimension, and most importantly, to provide constitutional alternatives to secession. This has often been accompanied by the conferral of organisational and programmatic autonomy to regional branches, especially evident within centre-left parties (Detterbeck and Hepburn, 2009).

Territory – including self-determination – is not the only cleavage to have re-emerged with the rise of minority nationalism and the growing trend towards decentralisation across European member states. European integration has become an equally important aspect of party competition, and in the regions of Europe this has been closely associated with possibilities for domestic constitutional change. Minority nationalist parties were amongst the first to make a link between Europe and self-determination, with parties variously arguing for a Europe of the Peoples, a Europe

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Anwen Elias, John Constantelos, Michael Keating, Charlie Jeffery and Ilenia Ruggiu for their comments on earlier drafts of this paper. I also gratefully acknowledge the support provided for this research by the Economic and Social Research Council (grant number PTA-026-27-1484).

of the Small States, or independence in Europe. But regional branches of statewide parties were also important contributors to these debates. The goal of a 'Europe of the Regions' was adopted by a number of regional branches of statewide parties, and linked to notions of subsidiarity, diversity and decentralisation. Importantly, from the statewide party perspective, a 'Europe of the Regions' appeared to offer a third way between centralisation and independence and was flexible enough to include a wide range of territorial and functional demands. It was thus highly popular amongst parties in government at the regional level, especially Social Democrats and Christian Democrats, who were keen to increase the reputation and resources of their region in Europe.

This aim of this article is to compare how the issues of Europe, and territory, have played out across three regional party systems. It reviews the 'Europe of the Regions' debate through an analysis of the territorial strategies of parties in Scotland, Bavaria and Sardinia over a period of a quarter century. Instead of focusing exclusively on minority nationalist parties, the discussion considers how Europe has become an important point of competition between regional parties of all political hues. More specifically, it examines how the imagery of a Europe of the Regions was used to support diverse party goals ranging from independence to rolling back European competences. The first section explores some theoretical contributions to the study of regional engagement in Europe, in particular highlighting gaps in multi-level governance approaches to regional political agency in Europe. The second part presents an empirical examination of how parties in Scotland, Bavaria and Sardinia interpreted, and responded to, claims for a Europe of the Regions 1979-2005. Part three provides a comparative analysis of the impact of Europe on territorial strategies across the cases, which traces the 'movement' of parties on the territorial and European dimensions. The closing section examines a number of explanatory factors that account for differentiation in party strategies across cases and across time.

### **Territorial Strategies and Regional Engagement in Europe**

It has been widely argued that the transformation of state and European structures has created new political and economic spaces in which territorial actors operate (Hooghe, 1995; Lynch, 1996; Keating, 1998; De Winter, 2001). The regional and European electoral arenas have increased in importance, and have warranted new strategies from political parties previously focused on state electoral competition (Hough and Jeffery, 2006). European institutions, networks and lobbying organisations have provided opportunities for territorial actors to develop a new political voice (Keating, 2006). European integration has opened up new possibilities to pursue territorial interests that were once 'closed' by the expansion of the nation-state (Bartolini, 2005). As a result of these developments, parties have been forced to adapt to complex multi-level political systems in which the regional, state and European dimensions influence each other (Deschouwer, 2003; Detterbeck and Hepburn, 2009). In particular, parties at the regional level have projected their interests beyond the state into transnational and supranational European arenas, such as regional networks, associations and EU institutions. These forms of engagement may involve 'bypassing' the state (see Keating, 1999), but they may also require regional parties to work through statewide actors and institutions to realize their demands (Jeffery, 2004).

The increasing European engagement of regional parties has occurred for a number of reasons. First, the decentralisation and Europeanisation of regional policy opened up direct links to EU decision-making processes and encouraged the articulation of 'political demands in regional terms and provided objects for political mobilisation' (Hooghe and Keating, 1994: 370). Second, European directives have an impact on ever-increasing areas of regional competences, such as economic development, social rights and the environment, and regional parties are obliged to articulate responses to, and policy positions on, these developments within the regional electoral arena. Third, Europe has provided an important symbolic or discursive space in which regional parties are able to advance claims for self-determination (Keating, 2006; Elias, 2006). Regional parties have adopted a variety of demands for autonomy in Europe that amount to less than

sovereign-state independence (Hepburn, 2004). These demands may be loosely brought under the umbrella term 'Europe of the Regions' though in some territories the preferred term is 'Europe of the Peoples'. What is important is that the imagery of a Europe of the Regions had both policy and constitutional implications. On one hand, it signifies the potential to realize substantive policy demands, such as economic resources, regional representation and increased control over regional competences. On the other, it has become the constitutional *leitmotif* of regional parties, symbolising widespread frustration with the predominantly intergovernmental workings of the EU, which have failed to recognize the rights and identities of regions and stateless nations. Therefore, for regional parties, a 'Europe of the Regions' did not mean the creation of a uniform institutional level in Europe – instead it was employed to capture a set of political, constitutional and economic goals directed towards Europe that enabled the realization of their specific territorial interests.

Although there has been a substantial body of work on the role of regional institutions in the EU, including the assertion that a 'third' or 'meso' regional level has emerged (Bullman 1994; Hooghe 1995; Jeffery 1997), there remains a lack of theoretical approaches to regional mobilisation in Europe. Theories of 'Europeanization' – which at the outset appear to be the most appropriate tool for explaining the political effects of Europe – have been unable to account for substate mobilisation on issues relating to integration. This is, firstly, because scholars overwhelmingly focus on how Europe *affects* politics at the state level (Hix and Lord 1997; Featherstone and Radaelli 2003). As Mair (2006: 3) points out, Europeanisation is usually perceived to occur when 'something in national political systems is affected by something European'. There is a notable lack of systematic accounts of how political actors project their demands upwards in Europe. Secondly, most analyses neglect the uses and perceptions of Europe by *substate* actors. Those that do consider the regional level often neglect the role of parties. For instance, Hooghe and Marks (2001) emphasise the open and flexible nature of the European system of 'multi-level governance' that allows room for non-state actors to become involved in decision-making across multiple levels. Their analysis focuses on how regional tiers of government were brought into the ambit of European decision-making. However, this analysis overplays 'the significance of central state-EU interactions in catalysing sub-national mobilisation' (Jeffery 2000: 3), and leaves the question of how regional actors mobilise demands for EU access unanswered. In its focus on institutions, theories of multi-level governance have tended to overlook bottom-up political mobilisation.

Deschouwer (2003: 213) concurs, arguing that MLG is 'very much a party-free zone'. His own research attempts to fill this gap by examining general patterns of party activity in different electoral arenas; what he calls 'multi-layered systems'. Of these, the regional and European electoral arenas have increased in importance, and have warranted new strategies from political parties previously concerned with only state electoral competition. Parties now operate in complex systems in which their regional, state and European components influence each other in 'three-way interactions' of a horizontal or vertical nature. In a similar vein, Dardanelli (2005) focuses on the relationship between the regional and European levels. Instead of considering Europeanisation to be a top-down process, he identifies 'bottom-up' aspects of Europeanisation, whereby political actors seek to shape the direction of European integration as a means of achieving their own aims. His main focus is on the opportunities, incentives and constraints that this presents for territorial actors.

Attempts have been made to link substate parties with European integration, but these are almost exclusively limited to minority nationalist parties (Lynch 1996; De Winter and Tursan 1998; Elias 2006). For instance, De Winter and Gomez-Reino (2002) conducted empirical research on the ways in which Europe influences goals and strategies of ethnoregionalist parties, examining their adaptation to European issues and their involvement in transnational alliances. Whilst this analysis advances our understanding of the impact of Europe on regionalist party interests and identities, it is unable to provide an overall view of the effects of Europe on the substate party politics in general. Nationalist parties are not the only actors that claim to be the 'bearers' of a national project; regional branches of statewide parties have also become active in defining territorial interests. This

necessitates an examination of how Europe, and territory, has played out across the regional party system as a whole. How have other parties at the substate level adapted to Europeanisation? And has Europe become an important point of competition between substate parties – be they nationalist, regionalist, socialist, liberal, conservative, or green?

This article explores the impact of European integration on the territorial party politics at the regional level, and considers the ways in which the domestic institutional context affects party adaptation and demands in Europe. This analysis is conducted in three diverse cases – Scotland, Bavaria and Sardinia – over a period of time, which enables an examination of the uneven effects of European integration in different places and at different stages. Hence, the comparison is temporal as well as spatial. This enables an analysis of the means by which regional parties have adapted their autonomy strategies to include the European dimension, how integration has encouraged the 'territorialisation' of statewide parties, and how European integration encourages parties to 'Europeanize' their demands by endorsing themes such as diversity and free trade. The period under analysis begins with the introduction of direct elections to the European Parliament in 1979 up until the rejection of the draft European Constitution by Dutch and French voters in 2005 – a period which covers major changes in the architecture of European institutions, as well as the territorial structures of member states. The analysis is based on qualitative research methods, comprising extensive interviews with officials from each party, analysis of party manifestos, speeches and campaign literature, and archival and media analysis.<sup>2</sup>

### **Regional Party Responses to a Europe of the Regions**

Scotland, Bavaria and Sardinia are geographically, economically and politically three of the most diverse substate entities in Western Europe. The first is considered a 'nation' in a devolved political system, the second a 'free state' in a federalized system, and the third a 'special region' in a decentralising system. Moreover, each has varying levels of economic power: whilst Bavaria is one of the richest regions in Europe, Sardinia is one of the poorest (with Scotland somewhere in between). What ties them all together is emergence of political parties which place the interests and identity of the territory at the heart of their political discourse, the existence of more than one political party vying for the representation of territorial interests, and the fact that the constitutional issue is open and contested in each territory and somehow linked to Europe (for a list of parties in each region, and their location in different 'party families', see the table below). Thus, instead of looking at just one actor in each case – e.g. the independence-seeking Scottish National Party (SNP), the autonomist Bavarian Christian Social Union (CSU) and the minority-nationalist Sardinian Party of Action (Psd'Az) – this approach takes a broader view, of how Europe has influenced regional party politics in general. The following section provides an overview of how territorial interests were correlated to a 'Europe of the Regions' in the three regions.

[Table 1 around here]

#### *Scotland and Devolution*

In Scotland, a Europe of the Regions was advocated by parties seeking constitutional reform and linked to devolution during the 1990s. Yet Scottish parties, with the exception of the Liberal Democrats, did not articulate a consistent line on Europe (Hepburn, 2006). Both Labour and the SNP were hostile to European integration during the early 1980s. Whilst Labour saw Europe as a Tory free-market project that undermined Scottish values, the SNP perceived the EC as centralist and believed Scottish interests would be ignored in intergovernmental negotiations. But with

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<sup>2</sup> This article draws on the findings of my PhD dissertation, in which a comprehensive explanation of the research methods used for this analysis is supplied (see Hepburn 2007).

Jacques Delors' new emphasis on the social dimension of integration in 1988, and the adoption of the subsidiarity principle in the Maastricht Treaty (1992), social-democratic parties began to view Europe in a more positive light. Labour made a strong association between constitutional change in Scotland and Europe, arguing that an 'enlarged democratic Europe of the Regions' would connect 'devolved economic and democratic structures at national and regional level [to] a more democratic European Community' (Martin, 1988: 83). Subsidiarity was viewed as a vital aspect of increased Scottish autonomy and Labour and the Liberal Democrats advocated a 'Europe of the Regions' to demonstrate that Scotland could command significant influence without seceding from the UK (though, whilst the LibDems viewed a regionalized Europe as the next step towards a federal Europe, Labour still believed in the primacy of the state and the need to present a 'united front' in an intergovernmental Europe). In parallel to Labour's pro-European shift, the Scottish Conservatives became increasingly critical of integration. More specifically, whilst the Tories advocated the benefits that a deregulated economic Europe would bring, they were openly hostile to political and social integration.

The SNP also reversed its position on Europe. The party adopted the goal of 'independence in Europe' in 1988, viewing the EU as a new framework for security and trading opportunities that could replace the 'external' structure of the UK state (SNP, 1992). The party even flirted with the idea of a regionalized Europe, seeking to increase Scotland's representation in the Committee of the Regions in 1994, but it quickly backtracked on the idea due to internal divisions and reiterated its commitment to independence (Hepburn, 2006). The association between 'independence' and 'Europe' was, however, questioned by a number of smaller parties that were critical of the European project, such as the Greens and Socialists, who advocated independence outside Europe until the perceived 'undemocratic' structures of the EU were reformed (SGP, 1994; SSP, 2004). In recent years, a more critical attitude towards Europe appears to have crept back into SNP rhetoric, and the party even threatened to oppose the draft European Constitution in 2005. To justify this scepticism, former SNP leader John Swinney maintained that in the early stages of integration, the SNP were naïve of the workings of Europe, and would accept anything put on their plate unquestioningly: now, one 'shouldn't always say yes to everything in Europe. There are some lines that we won't cross'.<sup>3</sup> The SNP's new stance partially reflects public attitudes toward European integration. Although Scottish attitudes to the EU have been slightly more positive than the rest of Britain since 1992, it is also true that all parts of Britain – including Scotland – have become more hostile to the EU following the signature of the Maastricht Treaty (McCrone et al, 1999; Park et al, 2001).

### *Bavaria and the Defence of the Lander*

In Bavaria, the idea of a 'Europe of the Regions' was associated with the need to protect the interests of the German Länder by the ruling Bavarian Christian Social Union (CSU). There was a fear that European integration was encroaching too much on Länder competences, and in response, the highly autonomist CSU proposed that European integration must go hand-in-hand with the protection of regional rights, and used this argument to push for the establishment of the CoR and increased regional representation in Europe (Hübner, 2005). Initially, such efforts were welcomed by parties across the Bavarian political spectrum, who all endorsed a Europe of the Regions. However, the way in which Bavaria's opposition parties chose to interpret this concept differed considerably from the CSU's version, which evolved to mean a 'Europe of the Citizens' for the Liberals, and a 'Europe of the Communes' for the Greens and SPD (BayernSPD, 1994; Die Grünen, 2003; FDP Bayern, 2003). Bavaria's main opposition parties are highly critical of the centralisation of power at the Bavarian level, and have argued for greater decentralisation to levels beneath the region in a 'Europe of the Regions within the Regions'. This, they argue, would constitute a 'true'

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<sup>3</sup> Interview with John Swinney, former SNP leader, Edinburgh, 21.2.2005.

application of subsidiarity, bringing power to the lowest level possible. In contrast, the 'micro' *Bayernpartei* (BP) believed a Europe of the Regions could underpin its demands for independence, though this goal belied an underlying antipathy towards the centralising aspects of the EU (Bayernpartei, 1993).

Since the late 1990s the CSU also appears to have lost its faith in the possibility of a regionalized Europe. It began to replace demands for a Europe of the Regions with a Europe of the Citizens in party literature (see CSU 1999). Moreover, its new territorial strategy was to increase its powers within the German federal state, whereby the central guiding philosophy has been: if you protect the 'hard shell' of the member state, you also protect the *Länder* (Jeffrey, 2004). This re-positioning was accompanied by an increasingly Eurosceptical view. Although the CSU is supportive of European integration in principle, in practice it argues that Europe should be kept out of the areas of Bavaria's economy and society where it is not welcome, and this applies especially to the question of immigration (Hepburn, 2008). This strategy may be partly aimed at outflanking other anti-EU parties in Bavaria, such as *die Republikaner*, which made electoral leaps in the *Freistaat* in the late 1980s and early 1990s, which reflected a sense of malaise towards European integration among the Bavarian populace (James, 1996).

### *Sardinia and Economic Modernisation*

In Sardinia, the idea of a Europe of the Regions failed to take hold in political debates as it did in Scotland and Bavaria. This was because the interpretation of regional opportunities in a 'Europe of the Regions' were reflected as primarily economic. As in Scotland, parties had moved from perceiving European integration as a threat to the island economy to seeing it as a possibility for reform and modernisation. Changes in the structural funds in the late 1980s qualified Sardinia for 'Objective One' status and the Sardinian Party of Action (*Partito Sardo d'Azione*—Psd'Az) and the Christian Democrats (DC/UDC) began linking a 'Europe of the Peoples' to possibilities for economic and political 're-birth' (Melis, 1994). Yet this idea failed to have resonance in political debates. This was because the EU was seen as a distant and bureaucratic structure that provided a source of external funding, rather than an opportunity structure to advance political demands. Moreover, because there was no direct representation of Sardinia in the European Parliament (instead it shares a seat with the larger Sicily), European issues are generally neglected because there is limited chance of electing a Sard MEP. In addition to these challenges, there was a disjuncture between popular and elite opinion. Since the injection of European funds into the Sard economy 'Europe' is popularly seen as a positive entity, however, parties advocating a Europe of the Regions or Peoples – including the Psd'Az, UDC and the Refounded Communist Party – faced the challenge of overcoming popular disillusionment about what 'autonomy' itself could offer. The cosmetic nature of the autonomy measures granted to Sardinia in 1948 and the failure of successive economic 'plans of rebirth' meant that the language of autonomy had become associated with Sardinia's economic and political dependence on Rome (Melis, 1982; Clark, 1989; Brigaglia et al, 2002). For the Sardinian electorate, obtaining more autonomy was less important than improving standards of living – thus economic goals were prioritized over constitutional change.

As a result of these various factors, the demands for the renewal of Sardinian autonomy were only loosely linked to processes of integration and regionalisation in Europe, in contrast to the other two cases. Whilst the Psd'Az's goal of a Europe of the Peoples gained only marginal support, the new wave of Sardinian nationalism, represented by ex-Psd'Az pro-independence break-away parties *Sardegna Natzione* (SN) and *Indipendentzia Repubrica Sardegna* (IRS), was highly critical of the European project (SN 1996; IRS 2003). Yet there has been a change in the perception of autonomy with the election of the Sardinian Project (PS) coalition in 2004. The PS has sought to strengthen Sardinia's voice in Italy, and break its dependence on Rome through a series of plans to become economically self-sufficient. This is supported across by parties across the political spectrum, including the centre-right *Forza Italia Sarda* and the Sardinian National Alliance (AN),

who have moved to a 'pro-devolution' position. However, the Project's interests lie primarily in reforming Sardinia's relations with the Italian state, in addition to developing linkages in the Mediterranean basin, rather than focusing on engagement with Europe. It is hoped that Sardinia could act as a 'bridge' between Europe and North Africa (Psd'Az, 2003; Sardegna Insieme, 2004). Opportunities to act in the Mediterranean appear to be more tangible to regional parties than trying to increase Sardinia's voice in the distant centres of European decision-making.

### **Common Impacts of Europe on Territorial Strategies**

Although this discussion has so far emphasized *variation* in regional party responses to Europe, this does not preclude us from drawing some general conclusions about the way in which Europe has influenced the conduct of territorial politics and party competition in all three cases. The following section examines three 'impacts' of Europe on regional party strategies identified at the beginning of the article, with reference to each of the cases.

#### *A new context for autonomy claims*

In each of the cases studied, the European level constituted a new focus of demands for autonomy during the initial period of deepening integration. Nationalist parties in all regions moderated their constitutional goals in the face of new possibilities for autonomy in Europe, whilst regional branches of statewide parties adopted stronger territorial demands. However, this was for a limited period only. Although independence-seeking parties in Scotland, Bavaria and Sardinia did modify their demands to include a 'Europe of the Regions', which sat alongside their long-term goals, in some cases this was only a temporary measure. The SNP quickly deserted its support for a regionalized Europe in 1994, almost immediately after it had used the slogan. The Bavarian Party also incorporated the concept into its literature, but this was secondary to its main goal of independence. In particular, the problem for nationalist parties adopting 'lesser' constitutional demands was that they were forced onto the same ground as statewide parties, and support for a Europe of the Regions reintroduced internal party divisions about the achievement of constitutional goals. For the SNP, Europe highlighted the divide between 'fundamentalists' and 'gradualists', the former arguing for statehood nothing less, whilst gradualists supported regionalisation measures as a step towards independence. The Sardinian nationalist movement splintered into pro-independence and pro-federalist parties, the former (IRS and SN) arguing for a confederal Europe, the latter (Psd'Az) arguing for a federal 'Europe of the Peoples'. The Psd'Az was the only party to move from a pro-independence position to a post-sovereignty, pro-Europe of the Regions position and remain there.

Regarding the strategies of regional branches of statewide parties, there was a 'meeting of minds' on certain policies in the 1990s. In Scotland and Sardinia, parties demanded stronger regional representation in state delegations to Europe, more access to European decision-making, and greater control over territorial issues affected by EU directives, whilst in Bavaria, opposition parties supported the CSU's government's efforts to increase Bavaria's direct participation in European networks and institutions. But after temporarily supporting the empowerment of regions in Europe, the SPD, Greens and FDP all moved to a position that prioritized the strengthening of the communes in Germany and Europe, whilst parties in Scotland began to re-emphasize the intergovernmental aspects of Europe and the need for a statewide 'united front' in state delegations. Like the nationalist parties, then, whilst there was a convergence of demands for a Europe of the Regions amongst regional branches of statewide parties in the early 1990s, parties moved away from this position at the end of that decade.

#### *The territorialisation of statewide parties*

Regional branches of statewide parties have gone through a process of 'territorialisation' in response to changing state and European structures and the creation of multi-level political arenas.



This has a number of dimensions. First, regional branches of statewide parties have taken on a stronger regional identity. Many have pledged to constitute *the* party of the nation/region and have made various vows to fight for territorial interests. Here we think particularly of Scottish Labour, the CSU and the Sardinian Project. Second, statewide parties have offered constitutional alternatives to independence to defuse support for nationalist parties. Regional branches of parties that have centralising platforms on the state level have adopted autonomist or federalist platforms, even including the traditionally centralist National Alliance (AN). During the 1990s, demands for a 'Europe of the Regions' won support from social democrats (the Scottish Labour Party, the Sardinian Democrats of the Left, the Bavarian SPD), Christian democrats (the Sardinian Union of Christian Democrats, the Bavarian CSU) liberal democrats (the FDP in Bavaria, the Scottish Liberal Party) and green parties (Alliance '90/The Greens in Bavaria). In particular, the concept gained support amongst regional government leaders, who had the greatest contact European institutions and networks and were thus more quickly exposed to European rhetoric and concepts.

Third, regional branches of statewide parties have adopted differentiated party programmes, discourse and campaign strategies, and have sought greater organisational autonomy and policy independence from the central party. Yet the mutation of a regional branch of a statewide party into a more independent regional-focussed electoral machine has not always met with the blessing of the central party, and in some cases tensions have caused the regional branch to threaten to break from the party altogether. This happened, for instance, to the Sardinian Refounded Communists, which threatened to secede from the Italian party as it did not take regional issues into consideration.<sup>4</sup> In Bavaria, the creation of the CSU after the war demonstrated the Bavarians' need for organisational and programmatic independence from Christian Democrats in the rest of Germany (represented by the CDU) in order to represent Bavarian interests first and foremost. The Bavarian SPD's adoption of a more 'Bavarian' stance has also led to discussions about breaking from the federal party.<sup>5</sup> Finally, in Scotland the Labour Party has consistently suffered internal divisions on the nationalist question (McEwen, 2004). This has led to breakaway factions, such as the nationalist-socialist Scottish Labour Party<sup>6</sup> in 1975, whilst at other times the party has been able to accommodate the nationalist sentiment of its members. Therefore, in addition to constituting a key source of competition between parties, the territorial dimension has fuelled conflicts within the parties themselves.

#### *A new European discourse*

Some scholars have argued that one effect of European integration on nationalist parties is their adoption of civic and inclusive criteria for territorial membership, and the need to emphasize their progressive pro-European credentials (Lynch, 1996; Keating, 2006). It has become important for minority nationalists to 'play' the European ideological 'game', which has been shaped by political dialogue at the EU level. This was evident in the discourse of the SNP and Psd'Az, both members of the European Free Alliance (EFA). These parties advocate principles and themes common to those of the EU – such as support for free trade, diversity and multiculturalism – and a pro-European ideology is important for them to be perceived as credible. However, as these cases have shown, it is certainly not the case for all parties. *Indipendentzia Repubrica de Sardigna*, *Sardignia Natzione* and the Scottish Socialist Party (not strictly a minority nationalist party, but seeking independence) have used the language of anti-colonialism to frame their claims for independence, and have strongly objected to the perceived neoliberal policies of the EU. In a different vein, the *Bayernpartei* has shunned all attempts to 'internationalize' its language, indeed, its vision of the Bavarian *Heimat* is closed to foreigners (Hepburn, 2008). Finally, the CSU, which is not considered

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<sup>4</sup> Interview with Roberto Cherchi, Sardinian RC Press Spokesperson, Cagliari, 19.5.2005.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Harald Schneider, BayernSPD Press Spokesperson, Munich, 2.2.2005.

<sup>6</sup> Not to be confused with the current Scottish Labour Party, which changed its name from the Scottish Council of the Labour Party in 1994.

to form part of the 'minority nationalist' family, but which nevertheless has articulated a nationalist vision of society and maximum autonomy for the nation, has escaped pressures to advance a civic nationalist discourse that are generally applied to members of EFA (see Lynch in this issue for more details on EFA ideology).

### **Support for a Europe of the Regions over time**

The preceding argument indicates that regional party responses to Europe not only diverge across cases, but also across time. The next section examines the case findings from a temporal perspective to explain why the potency of a Europe of the Regions rose and fell during the 1990s. Three stages in the evolution of substate party goals in Europe are identified: 1979-87, a period characterized by nationalist and left-wing animosity to the European project; 1988-94 when the idea of a regionalized Europe led to a convergence of party demands for autonomy in Europe; and 1995-2005, when the perceived failure of a regionalized Europe caused parties to revert back to state-focused strategies.

The first period of party 'positioning' on Europe lasted from 1979 to 1987. The year 1979 marked the introduction of the first elections to the European Parliament, at which point parties became more involved in European institutions and were forced to compete on European themes. During this period, the constitutional goals of parties were not yet tied to project of European integration. This was because (1) regions were still viewed implicitly as 'recipients' of EC funds rather than active participants in the decision-making process; (2) peripheral regions were disadvantaged by the new European market and many regional parties did not see European integration in a wholly positive light; and (3) because of the weak political and constitutional evolution of Europe. Instead, Europe was viewed as a distant structure by regional parties and territorial demands were channelled to the state. When applying this analysis to the cases, we see that during the period 1979-87, nationalist parties in Scotland and Bavaria both adopted anti-EU positions, seeking independence outside Europe. The Psd'Az is the exception: in 1979 it was both pro-independence and pro-European. Both centre-left and centre-right parties in Scotland and Sardinia were also unsympathetic to demands for either regionalisation or federalism during this time. Where they differ is that whilst the Left (the PCI, PSI and SLP) was sceptical of all aspects of European integration, the Right (the Scottish Conservatives and *Movimento Sociale Italiano*—predecessor of the AN) tended to be pro-economic integration. The Bavarian Greens were the only supporters of a 'Europe of the Regions' in 1979, based on the grounds of stateless nations' rights to self-determination, though they were the exception to the rule amongst party families. Meanwhile, Liberal (Democrat) and Christian Democrat parties supported federalism or decentralisation within Europe (including the Scottish LibDems, the Sardinian UDC, and the Bavarian CSU and FDP).

The second period lasts from 1988 to 1994, with the year 1988 signifying Jacques Delors' commitment to a social Europe and the reform of the European structural funds, and 1994 marking the creation of the Committee of the Regions under the Treaty of Maastricht. During this period, the regionalisation debates encouraged statewide parties to articulate the place of their region within the evolving structures of Europe, and to develop demands for autonomy framed within the context of a 'Europe of the Regions'. Simultaneously, the idea of a Europe of the Regions persuaded many minority nationalist parties to moderate their demands and participate in the regionalisation debates. Drawing on the case studies, we find that there was a convergence of demands for a Europe of the Regions, which was advocated by centre-left, Christian Democrat, Green and Liberal parties. Indeed, many on the Left (Scottish Labour, Sardinian DS/RC and Bavarian SPD) adopted a pro-autonomy and pro-European position simultaneously. At the same time, support for a Europe of the Regions was most strongly associated with parties in regional government – the Sardinian Christian Democrats, the Bavarian CSU and Scottish Labour from 1997. Minority nationalist parties also utilized the term, but whilst commitment to this goal achieved longevity within the Psd'Az, the SNP and BP only briefly flirted with the idea of a regionalized Europe. The Bavarian Greens at this

point began to drop their commitment to a Europe of the Regions, in response to the CSU's monopolisation of the term, and advocated decentralisation to regions within regions of Europe. Meanwhile, the regional Right remained outside the 'convergence' pattern due to parties' commitment to state integration of the territory in an intergovernmental Europe.

During the last period, from 1995 to 2005, parties began to question whether their territorial strategies could be met in Europe. This was spurred by the failure of the CoR to constitute anything more than a 'talking-shop', the continuing centralisation of powers at the state level in the Council of Ministers, and the failure of regions to obtain guarantees for a stronger regional role in the draft European Constitution. A number of minority nationalist parties even opposed, or threatened to oppose, the draft European Constitution in national referendums, such as the SNP and *Bloque Nacionalista Galego* (for more information on the BNG's changing attitudes to Europe see Elias in this issue). The apparent 'closing' of opportunities for regions to act in Europe put an end to cross-party consensus on pursuing regional autonomy in Europe. As opportunities appeared to dwindle, some parties began to fall back on state channels, whilst others adopted more Eurosceptical positions. Looking at the cases, the regional Left lost its cohesiveness as a party family, with parties taking up a range of stances from independence outside Europe, to more fiscal autonomy in a federal or regional Europe. Likewise, the regional Right adopted a variety of positions, endorsing confederalism, federalism and devolution (though for the Sardinian AN and FI the latter goal actually meant continuing regional structural dependence on state finances). The Green family has also adopted a variety of positions, ranging from opposition to 'regional egocentrism' to supporting independence for minority nations. The Liberal (Democrat) parties have been most consistent in demands for a federal Europe, although to qualify this, there are differences between parties on the type of federalism sought, and the recognition of regions within these structures. Finally, within the minority nationalist party family we can identify growing scepticism of European integration from the late 1990s. The SNP, CSU and the new wave of Sardinian nationalist and Scottish independence-seeking parties became more forceful in their opposition to the continued intergovernmental nature of European decision-making that ignored regional interests.

### **Explaining Variation in Regional Responses to Europe**

It is clear from the above discussion that political parties in the substate regions and nations of Europe have developed a variety of responses to integration processes, ranging from demands for greater recognition of territorial distinctiveness, to protest against a perceived threat to their competences – despite the main issues of European integration being constant across cases. Based on the case analyses, we can identify a number of factors that have affected parties' territorial strategies in Europe. These are (1) access to European institutions and organisations, (2) local party competition, (3) economic resources and (4) constraints of state structures.

With regard to the first variable, political parties operate within distinct opportunity structures determined by the incentives and constraints of state territorial management. Thus, parties have different levels of *access to European institutions and organisations* within and across cases, and across time (with recently decentralized regions gradually gaining enhanced rights of participation in Europe). Those in government at the regional level will also have experience of European institutions, as their party representatives are directly involved in policy-making. As a result, they will be in a stronger position to affect the development of issues and agendas at the European level than parties who are only represented in the European Parliament, or in European political parties, or neither. Whilst Scotland and Bavaria have relatively good access to European institutions, in terms of their seats in the European Parliament, the Committee of the Regions, and involvement in associations such as Regions with Legislative Powers (RegLeg), Sardinia was unable to muster even its own MEP owing to the way in which European constituencies are carved up in Italy. Parties' ability to access European institutions directly affects their ability to influence the development of agendas at the European level.

There may be an interesting causal effect of increased party involvement in Europe over time. The case analyses indicate that parties increased engagement in European institutions correlates with a greater sense of disillusionment with the limits of regional empowerment in the European project – evidenced in the ways in which Bavarian, and then Scottish parties become increasingly sceptical about what they could achieve in Europe. Therefore, it appears that – counter-intuitively – the more ‘institutional learning’ parties undergo in Europe, the more likely they are to be disillusioned with the apparent possibilities presented by European integration. Political parties with first-hand involvement in European institutions and networks realise more quickly where the constraints of the regional agenda in Europe lie. Once they are wiser to the limitations of Europe for territorial projects, the more likely they are to retreat to traditional channels of lobbying through the state for the protection of competences in state delegations. Contrarily, parties with relatively limited experience in, and access to, European channels may be more naively enthusiastic about the possibilities for regions in Europe. This is evident in Sardinia, where parties are almost uniformly and unquestioningly pro-European.

Second, the economic status and resources of substate territories affect parties’ territorial strategies in Europe. Each territorial party draws on different economic and cultural resources upon which to base their strategies. Parties operating in rich regions can mobilize the population around programmes that increase the region’s autonomy to act in European and global markets without fear of losing economic protection from the state. Indeed, as was seen in the case of Bavaria, parties operating in wealthy regions may want to reduce what amounts to their protection of other regions in the state through fiscal equalisation programmes. In particular, for parties seeking independence in Europe, it is important that they make their projects economically viable. This is a problem for substate parties operating in poorer regions, whereby the territory’s dependence on transfer payments and state protection may undermine demands for independence. For instance, the SNP only began its electoral rise in Scotland after it was able to mount an economic case for independence, based on oil revenues following the discovery of North Sea oil in the 1970s. Lacking such resources, the Psd’Az was unable to mount such a strong economic case for autonomy in Sardinia. At the same time, the EU has provided a new centre of resources and funding for substate actors to access. For these parties seeking independence, and others, the EU has provided a new centre of resources and funding for substate actors to access. All of the territories examined have in some way or another benefited from EU structural funding, but their ‘dependence’ on such funds has differed widely, and this has also changed across time in relation to regional economic growth.

Equally important to some substate parties may be the protection of some traditional sectors of the economy from European competition, as well as from European quotas. Bavaria has sought to protect its farming and crafts communities, Scotland its coastal fishing communities, and Sardinia its shepherds and farming communities. There is evidence of a tendency towards economic protectionism in each of the regions, based on safeguarding regional industries and promoting exports in the face of competition. For instance, the SNP threatened to oppose the draft European Constitution in a statewide referendum if the EU did not devolve fishing competences, the CSU criticised the European competition policy for undermining its ability to subsidise public services, and the Sardinian Project sought to promote exports labelled ‘made in Sardinia’ rather than ‘made in Italy’ in wider European and Mediterranean markets. Substate parties have used protectionism as an entrustment of region-building – by developing indigenous industries, and by emphasising the importance of traditional industries to the culture and well-being of the region.

Third, local party competition clearly affects territorial strategies. Electorally and politically significant parties have been able to set the territorial agenda in the region, and other parties must respond to this. This has been the case for the CSU and the SNP, which both adopted strong European platforms. These parties have been able to define the territorial cleavage and competition on the territorial dimension, which has encouraged regional branches of statewide parties to adopt more ‘regional’ profiles and policies. The strength of a nationalist or autonomy-seeking party within

a given region also necessitates the development of alternative constitutional demands by their political opponents. Contrarily, if there is no strong nationalist party in the territory, the territorial dimension of party competition is determined elsewhere – by parties in government, or parties with a goal of federalism – and the territorial project may be submerged under other socioeconomic issues. This has been the case in Sardinia, where nationalism has been accommodated by statewide parties, thereby weakening the Psd'Az's ability to make European integration – an issue linked to the party's autonomy goals – an important dimension of party competition. The Psd'Az was not strong enough to either make its demands for autonomy in Europe heard, or to pose a threat to the integrity of the Italian state, unlike the SNP and CSU.

Finally, the development and pursuit of territorial strategies in Europe is affected by state constraints, which again vary across regions and across time in relation to decentralisation and territorial restructuring. Each region operates within different state structures, of a devolved state, a federal state and a decentralising state, and political parties have to respond to the constraints and opportunities this presents accordingly in order to access Europe and legislate on European matters. For instance, the Bavarian government has access to Germany's European policy-making through the Bundesrat; the devolved Scottish Executive/Government since 1999 contributes to the UK negotiating line in Europe through intergovernmental channels and the Joint Ministerial Council, and the Sardinian Junta has been pressing for greater regional representation in Italian intra-state institutions. But whilst Germany and the UK have allowed Scotland and Bavaria considerable room to manoeuvre, Sardinian parties had few channels to Europe through the state, thereby weakening their influence over, and interest in, political developments in Europe. In addition to differential access to Europe through statewide institutions, the relative political importance of parties within the state also affects their European and territorial projects. For instance, in Italy, the main demands for constitutional reform were coming from the *Lega Nord* in the North, not from the Psd'Az in the South. This is in contrast to the SNP in Scotland and the CSU Bavaria, which led the demands for devolution and the reform of federalism in the UK and Germany respectively.

## Conclusions

During the mid-1990s, the goal of a Europe of the Regions was almost unanimously supported by parties spanning the entire political spectrum in the three case studies examined. The imagery of a regionalised Europe was used to support a variety of territorial projects, including constitutional goals (being linked to federalism, devolution and independence), socioeconomic goals (access to European structural funding) and protectionism (pushing back European competences). Thus, despite facing similar opportunities and challenges in Europe, regional responses to European integration varied widely. This analysis challenges much of the thinking on European integration and multi-level governance. Previous literature has failed to explain the complexity of regional responses to Europe, or to examine bottom-up party political mobilisation on European issues. More questionably, many analyses of MLG assume that European integration has a blanket effect across territories. The findings contained herein demonstrate that this is far from the truth. It was shown in the case studies that European integration is interpreted differently, often inversely, in different contexts and at different times – either as a set of opportunity structures or constraints for realizing territorial interests. Most remarkably, whilst some regional parties viewed Europe as an alternative framework to the state for advancing their autonomy, others perceived integration as a threat, and sought to strengthen the state to prevent Europe from encroaching on their competences. These vastly differing responses to Europe resulted from domestic institutional factors – including of access to Europe, party competition, resources and state structures – which affected substate party adaptation to, and uses of, European integration.

An equally striking aspect of this case study analysis is that parties have frequently changed their positions on Europe over time, in particular, becoming more Eurosceptical when they believed their demands were not being met. The increasing sense of Euro-scepticism surrounding the draft

European Constitution, evident especially in Scotland and Bavaria, indicates that parties have loosened the ties between autonomy claims and the evolving regionalisation project, and have moved back to more Eurosceptical positions. This demonstrates the instrumental nature of substate party support for integration. The adoption of these 'European' terms by substate parties was often tactical, as was the adoption of a 'pro-European' attitude more generally – for some parties it was clearly motivated by the desire to receive resources, increase influence and to be accepted into European party families, rather than demonstrating long-term attitudinal change. To that end, Europeanisation can be understood as a strategy by parties to manipulate the dimensions of a given political issue – be it autonomy, economic resources or protectionism – at the local, state or European levels. This is evident in the discourse of minority nationalist parties, which have become increasingly critical of European integration, owing to the realisation that some European directives threaten territorial interests, whilst regional branches of statewide parties have begun to re-emphasize the benefits of state unity. This means that the decade just passed may be remembered as a fleeting phase of cross-party convergence regarding the aims of autonomy in a Europe of the Regions, amidst a general era when the constitutional aims of regional parties were more polarized – with those seeking independence and other forms of self-determination on one side and the rest devising strategies to prevent this from happening on the other.

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